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ABSTRACT

The University of Northern Iowa is fully committed to the ideas of equal opportunity, cultural diversity and sensitivity. The Oral Communication Basic Course Program in the Communication Studies Department is fully committed to teaching students to appreciate and actively use principles of cultural diversity and sensitivity in their daily lives. Toward that end, there are several tools the instructors use in mass lectures and classroom recitation sections, and that they will use in their Oral Communication Basic Course Computer Laboratory, to teach students about cultural diversity and sensitivity, including textbook selection, graduate student assistant and faculty orientation, class exercises, and class assignments. (RS)

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PROMOTING CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND SENSITIVITY IN THE BASIC COMMUNICATION COURSE

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Introduction

As the Basic Communication Course moves into the twenty-first century, many changes are taking place as student needs are reassessed, and as technical, political and social changes take place globally. We should be very proud of our Communication discipline, because such technical, political and social changes are often very quickly reflected in our classrooms through course content, activities, discussion and interpersonal interaction. One of the most predominant changes that is taking place in our world socially, and that is currently being reflected in our classrooms, is the acknowledgment of cultural diversity and sensitivity.

The University of Northern Iowa, as many other educational institutions, is fully committed to the ideas of equal opportunity and cultural diversity and sensitivity, and we in the Oral Communication Basic Course Program in the Communication Studies Department are fully committed to teaching our students to appreciate and actively use principles of cultural diversity and sensitivity in their daily lives. Toward that end there are several tools that we use in mass lectures and classroom recitation sections, and that we will use in our Oral Communication Basic Course computer laboratory, to teach our students about cultural diversity and sensitivity. This paper outlines several of the processes and tools that we use to promote the concepts of cultural diversity and sensitivity in the Oral Communication classroom at the University of Northern Iowa, and that can be used in any Basic Communication Course classroom. Dr. Melissa Beall examines the promotion of cultural diversity and sensitivity to students in activities that will be conducted in our Oral Communication computer laboratory in another presentation at this conference.

How the Oral Communication Basic Course is Structured at UNI

The Oral Communication Basic Course at the University of Northern Iowa is a General Education requirement, and we serve over 1,000 students a semester. It is a hybrid course that focuses on public speaking, interpersonal communication and small group communication during the semester. Currently, five sections of the course are offered each fall and spring in a mass lecture and recitation section format for three credit hours.

A Master Teacher, who is a tenured faculty member or on a tenure-track appointment, teaches a mass lecture once a week for 50 minutes to approximately 200 students. Each mass lecture section is divided into four to six recitation sections of approximately 30 students each, which meet for 150 minutes a week. The Master Teacher is also responsible for a recitation section, and she or he supervises the instructors who teach the other recitation sections. Recitation instructors are composed of tenured, tenure-track, term and temporary faculty, as well as Graduate Teaching Assistants.

Delivery of course content in the mass lectures is supported by the use of computer, video and audio technology to enhance the learning opportunities for our students that has been developed by Dr. Beall and Dr. Siddens. The course text is Understanding and Sharing: An Introduction to Speech Communication (Pearson and Nelson, 1993) and a course guide is also used, Guide to Oral Communication (Beall, 1993).

Cultural Diversity in the Oral Communication Classroom at UNI

Awareness of, and sensitivity to, cultural diversity and other related issues are of particular importance to teachers and administrators at the University of Northern Iowa because of the ethnic homogeneity of our student body. Over 90% of our students come from Iowa, and of course, our state is relatively low in minority

representation as a population. Many of our students come from very small towns in Iowa, and have had few opportunities to interact with people from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, etc. Because these students have had little opportunity to interact with people from other cultures, and because for the time being at least, that trend will continue to some degree in their university experience, it is of particular importance to us as faculty and administrators to teach our students about how to appreciate and interact with people from different cultures.

There are many ways that principles of cultural diversity and sensitivity are emphasized and taught in our Oral Communication classrooms. Some of the vehicles that we use to address these important topics in our course are: the course textbook and course content; orientation of Graduate Teaching Assistants and full and part time faculty; course exercises; and course assignments. These vehicles serve as topics in this paper to address how we emphasize and teach cultural diversity and sensitivity in the Basic Oral Communication course classroom at the University of Northern Iowa.

Cultural Diversity and the Basic Communication Course Textbook

One of the central foundations of most Basic Communication Courses is the course textbook. Course content and direction emerge primarily from this very valuable tool, and there are many textbooks from which to choose. Deciding which textbook is appropriate for each Basic Communication Course program is a very important process, and this decision is based upon many different considerations and criteria. As the world, and our discipline, have become more attuned to teaching students about cultural diversity and sensitivity, these important issues have become a more central part of our Basic Communication Course textbooks, and they have also become a more central part of the process of deciding on which textbook to use in the Basic Communication Course.

As previously mentioned, at the University of Northern Iowa we currently use Pearson and Nelson's Understanding and Sharing: An Introduction to Speech Communication (1993) as our Basic Communication Course textbook, and when considering which textbook to adopt for the course, one of our major criteria in accepting a textbook was the presence of content on cultural diversity and sensitivity. Pearson and Nelson now include a chapter titled "Intercultural and Co-cultural Communication" in their textbook, and this consideration, along with several others, led us to select this text for our course. As cultural diversity and sensitivity become more predominant as topics in the Basic Communication course, more and more of our Basic Communication Course texts will reflect this by specifically incorporating more information on these subjects in the text content through complete chapters and units.

Already many of our Basic Communication Course textbooks feature chapters and sections that are devoted to cultural communication issues and many indices of our Basic Communication Course textbooks include several references to culture, cultural communication, intercultural communication, multicultural communication and other related topics and subjects. For instance, in addition to Pearson and Nelson, who have included a chapter on intercultural communication in their Basic Communication Course textbook, Devito in Human Communication (1994) divides his text into seven parts. Part Six is titled "Intercultural Communication" and it contains two units on culture and communication. In Fundamentals of Human Communication (1993), DeFleur, Kearney and Plax divide their text into four parts with fifteen chapters. Part Four is titled "Communication, Culture and Society" and features one chapter on intercultural communication. Gouran, Wiethoff and Doelger in Mastering Communication (1994) also wrote a new chapter on culture and communication titled "Intercultural Communication" for this latest edition of their Basic Communication Course textbook. These are but a few examples of the many Basic Communication

Course textbooks that are directly acknowledging the importance of teaching cultural diversity and sensitivity in our classrooms by including a significant amount of content on these topics and other related topics.

In addition, while several Basic Communication Course textbooks may not include complete chapters or sections on culture and communication, many have significant references to these subjects and related topics within the content of their textbooks, and they reflect this in the indices of their texts. For instance, in Communicating by Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin (1992) the subject "intercultural communication" has five referents. Adler and Rodman, in Understanding Human Communication (1994) cite 13 references under the subject "culture," and in Principles of Human Communication (1992), Smith refers readers to four topics under the subject "culture(s)." All this provides significant support for the notion that our textbooks are beginning to provide stronger and stronger support for teaching our students about cultural diversity and sensitivity by directly including content on these topics in the textbooks and that is readily accessible to teachers and students through tables of contents and indices.

Further, course guides and instructors manuals are beginning to reflect a consciousness of cultural issues by addressing culture and communication more directly through exercises, articles, etc. For instance, at the University of Northern Iowa, our course guide, Guide to Oral Communication (Beall, 1993) contains information on cultural diversity through articles such as "In Praise of Cultural Diversity" and "Intercultural Communication and Cultural Differences." Course Guides and Instructors Manuals can be of great assistance in helping instructors of the Basic Communication Course promote and teach cultural diversity and sensitivity by providing ancillary materials such as overhead projections, articles, exercises, examples, test questions, etc. that can be used directly in the classroom. I am sure that

as cultural issues become more central to our textbooks, this centrality will be evidenced by providing more support materials for teachers through these venues.

Another avenue of support that will be found increasingly in class rooms will be hypertexts; computer, video and audio presentation programs that support delivery of course content. At the University of Northern Iowa, we have developed such a computer software program that supports classroom delivery of course content of the 6th Edition of the Pearson and Nelson text. Such hypertexts might be built around materials that support specific print texts, or can they can be developed independently of print texts, and can focus on topic specific materials, such as cultural diversity and sensitivity. The computer, video and audio presentation technology briefly described herein is currently enjoying popularity that is similar to cultural diversity and sensitivity. Both are "very hot topics" right now and it seems almost natural to combine these two "new" ideas.

Orientation of Graduate Teaching Assistants and Full and Part Time Faculty

Orientation of new and returning graduate teaching assistants and full and part time faculty is another important opportunity to emphasize the importance of focusing on the issues of cultural diversity and sensitivity in the Basic Communication Course classroom. Specific sessions should be conducted during these orientations that demonstrate to all teaching personnel the need to instruct our students about these important ideas. It is also important that all teaching personnel understand that the commitment to teaching these ideas goes beyond just their place in the course content; that there is also a moral and ethical obligation on our part to help our students become the best people they can be by helping them be more culturally sensitive and aware.

While our textbooks and other teaching support materials provide more and more direct references to the theoretic and practical aspects of culture and

communication, culture is also an important factor that is implicit across many different areas of the communication spectrum. In orientation sessions it is important to direct teachers' attention to the connections that are to be made between culture and many of the topics that will be addressed in the Basic Communication Course classroom. For instance, culture has a large impact on topics such as nonverbal communication, language, relational communication, small group communication, audience analysis, etc., etc. I find that the teaching sessions in which I do not refer to the impact of culture on communication topics in general are occuring less and less. It seems that the cultural aspects of communication experiences make up more and more of the examples that I use in class to demonstrate principles of communication. Orientation sessions provide a perfect time to reinforce these connections with our faculty so they can better utilize opportunities to teach our students about cultural issues and awareness.

Promoting Cultural Diversity Through Class Exercises

We can talk to our students about cultural issues forever, but perhaps the best way to really teach them, and demonstrate to them, the meaning of these lessons is to allow them to experience these ideas through classroom exercises. For instance, at the beginning of the semester at the University of Northern Iowa we frequently use an exercise called "Cultural Pursuit" (Ng, Mosely and Matsui; date unknown) in mass lecture or in recitation sections of the Basic Oral Communication course to begin to expose students to the concepts of culture, diversity and sensitivity. It is also a good ice-breaker for the beginning of the semester as it allows students to begin to get to know each other.

The exercise consists of a sheet of paper with a grid divided into five by five squares. Each square contains a statement related to cultural awareness and/or issues. The purpose of the exercise is for all the students in the room to circulate and

to find 25 different individuals who can each explain the meaning of a statement or has experienced a situation described in a statement. Some examples of these statements are: "Has had her/his name mispronounced;" "Knows what an upside down triangle symbolizes;" and "Knows what Rosa Parks did." The exercise enables students to get to know one another, and to exchange some significant information on different ideas and experiences. They can also test their knowledge of different cultures and ways of being in the world. We have used this exercise in mass lectures with up to 90 people, in TA and faculty orientation sessions with less than 10 and over twenty people, and in recitation laboratory sections with up to thirty people. This exercise is particularly useful for introducing students to the concepts of culture and diversity and to help them begin to see that differences exist between people at many different levels. There is an answer key available that explains the meanings of the different statements.[redacted]

Another interesting exercise can be used to demonstrate connections between culture and an important component of communication, nonverbal communication. In this exercise, I ask several different students to face one another and talk casually, but as their conversation continues, I work with them on changing distances between one another. This exercise is very useful in demonstrating the effects of culture on territoriality and personal space. For instance, I have students stand toe-to-toe and nose-to-nose, as is the conversational practice in many Middle Eastern and European cultures. Then, I allow them to move back a step, or to arms length, etc., using distances that are more conversationally comfortable in American culture. This exercise creates a lot of discussion on cultural norms and how they affect interpersonal interaction, as well as on the principles of territoriality and personal space, and how culture impacts our senses of comfort and well being. It is also interesting to mix dyads by gender to see what effect gender has on these dynamics. I

always try to insure that I use dyads that consist of two males, two females and a male and a female.

There are many different exercises that can be conducted in classes to teach and to demonstrate to students principles of culture and diversity and their relationships to communication theories and practices. These exercises are particularly useful in allowing us to show students how intercultural concepts and ideas apply within the context of real-life experiences.

Promoting Cultural Diversity Through Class Assignments

Of course, another way to promote students' exposure to and learning about cultural diversity and sensitivity is to create assignments that allow them to work with these concepts. As culture and intercultural communication grow in the amount of time and space devoted to them in our textbooks and courses, students will be tested more and more over these kinds of materials, encouraging them to study them and learn them. In addition, as these topics become more central in our classes, students will be asked to complete assignments specifically designed to investigate these concepts. Further, culture is a rather ubiquitous subject, and as indicated above in the section on cultural diversity and class exercises, culture can be addressed in relation to many topics that exist within the Basic Communication course. Because of these close relationships, culture can also be investigated through class assignments in relation to, or as a component of, many other different topics and assignments.

For instance, at the University of Northern Iowa, part of the requirements of the Basic Oral Communication course are that students complete a group presentation project. For the past year, we have used this requirement as a vehicle to further expose our students to multiculturalism. Each group is required to research a topic and report to the class on that topic in a formal, videotaped presentation. Lately we have required that the topic investigated be a culture of the students choice. We have

observed presentations on the Amish, the Mesquakie Indian Tribe, the Jewish, gangs, teenagers, and the ancient Greeks, to name but a few. This assignment requires students to research and study a particular culture in depth, investigating aspects of the culture such as; nonverbal communication, family relationships, social and political practices, and many other topics. In the assignment they are able to use the critical, analytical, research, organizational and delivery skills that we have taught them to understand more fully another culture, and to convey that understanding to an audience.

There are many assignments that can also be created that emerge directly from chapters on culture and intercultural communication. For instance, students can be asked to work on projects that help them understand and demonstrate concepts such as: assimilation and accommodation perspectives; cultures and co-cultures; co-languages such as argot, jargon and slang; coenetics, ethnocentrism and stereotyping. Or, as previously mentioned, such concepts can also be investigated in assignments in association with concepts of communication theory and practice. For instance, looking at co-languages while studying the textbook chapter on language; studying coenetics while working on the nonverbal textbook chapter, etc.

Conclusion

Technology, politics and human nature have all combined and conspired to shrink our world. Modern technology enables us to communicate all over the globe with more speed, clarity and immediacy than ever before. The past ten years have seen the crumbling of the Berlin Wall and the beginnings of peace in the Middle East and between Ireland and Britain. The shift from the melting pot metaphor to the quilt and tossed salad metaphors demonstrate we are finally recognizing the value of acknowledging the behaviors and beliefs that make up each of the many different cultures that exist in America and all around the world. Again, we should be very

proud of our discipline, because these bridges of communication that are being built and restored everyday now are reflected in our very own classrooms. We can and should promote cultural diversity and sensitivity in our classrooms. They are a significant part of the theory and practice of our discipline, and a significant part of our moral, ethical and pedagogical charges.

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